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McNamara Opens Inquiry In Vietnam on War Crisis

By HEDRICK SMITH
Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Dec. 19—Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara arrived in Saigon this afternoon and plunged immediately into a thorough analysis of the critical state of the war against the Communist guerrillas.

United States officials said that the briefings given Mr. McNamara, who was sent here by President Johnson on a two-day fact-finding mission, were the bluntest ever prepared for a top-level American visitor.

A high-ranking officer who arrived here from Washington three days ago said preliminary briefings indicated that the situation in the populous Mekong Delta region south of Saigon was "rough—really rough."

Mr. McNamara's arrival coincided not only with a growing awareness among United States officials of the seriousness of the war situation, but also with mounting Vietnamese and American concern over the apparent lack of leadership being exerted by the military junta that seized power Nov. 1.

Grave Fears Voiced

A number of United States officials have voiced grave fears about the prospects of winning the war unless the new Government moves with greater vigor in the weeks ahead. These officials are counting on Mr. McNamara's talks with leading generals tomorrow to impart a new sense of urgency as well as to reassure Vietnamese leaders of Washington's support at this critical juncture.

American concern was underlined by the presence at the briefings of John A. McCone, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and Leonard Unger, United States Ambassador to neighboring Laos, long considered an important supply route for Communist guerrilla forces.

Both Mr. Unger and Mr. McCone slipped into Vietnam unannounced yesterday.

Arriving with Mr. McNamara today were William P. Bundy, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, and Arthur Sylvester, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs.

They were greeted by Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, General Paul D. Harkins, who is in charge of United States military aid operations here, and Maj. Gen. Tran Van Don, Defense Minister and second-ranking member of South Vietnam's military junta.

In a terse statement on his arrival, Mr. McNamara said he would "Discuss the progress of the United States [military] program and find out what problems are involved and how to solve them."

He parried newsmen's questions about whether he brought Vietnam's military Revolutionary Council any special message from President Johnson and entered a waiting limousine with Mr. Lodge.

An hour later Mr. McNamara went to General Harkins' headquarters for a round of briefings by military and foreign aid officials, most of them field workers in the Mekong delta provinces where the war situation has deteriorated most seriously in recent months.

The briefings, delayed by Mr. McNamara's late arrival after a close scrape at Orly Airport in Paris, began at about 4 P.M. and extended into evening. In Paris, the Secretary's pilot barely averted a runway collision just landed.

One American source said the briefing officers here had been

The Proceedings In the U. N.

YESTERDAY
(Dec. 19, 1963)

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Heard report on the international monetary fund; discussed work of the Council in 1964 and questions arising out of the 18th session of the General Assembly, the enlargement of the Economic, Social and Coordination Committees, and the United Nations Training and Research Institute.

SCHEDULED FOR TODAY (Dec. 20, 1963)

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Meets at 10:30 A.M. and 3 P.M.

Tickets may be obtained at the public desk, main lobby, United Nations Headquarters. Groups may reserve by mail.

Instructed to make their presentations completely candid, no matter how painful. He indicated that reports stressed not only

serious trends in the delta, but also complaints from lower ranking Vietnamese officials and extended into evening. In about the lack of direction from Paris, the Secretary's pilot barely averted a runway collision just landed.

Vietnamese newspapers also took up this question today.

One Vietnamese-language news

a "reshuffle of the provisional Government" and removal of Premier Nguyen Ngoc Tho. It also criticized Gen. Duong Van Minh, chairman of the Military Revolutionary Council, as timid and cautious.

The Saigon Daily News, an English-language newspaper, urged Mr. McNamara to take up the question of weak leadership directly with the council chairman.

In a front-page editorial the newspaper said: "In the last analysis, the decisive factor—which is still missing—is leadership. Without it, the Vietcong [Vietnamese Communists] will hold the upper hand because there is leadership on their side."

The newspaper also challenged Washington's goal of withdrawing the bulk of United States military forces from Vietnam by the end of 1965, a date set by the White House in October after Mr. McNamara's last visit here.

"The fall of the Ngo Dinh

Diem administration has now put the American Government before a new situation and a new situation requires a new appraisal and new decisions."

Key United States officials here already regard the 1965 target date as unrealistic. Several felt at the time it was set that it was used for domestic political reasons. But others suggested it stemmed from an over-optimistic military estimate of the war.

The question of a possible change in the date was expected to be a major item in Mr. McNamara's talks here.

Informed sources said Mr. McCone had arrived to preside over an intelligence personnel reorganization that started after the coup d'état that toppled Ngo Dinh Diem.